



# op/ed

by Dan Liebman

## COMMISSIONER POWER

It was refreshing listening to Adam Silver Tuesday afternoon.

The NBA had a problem, and it needed to deal with it swiftly and strongly. One of its owners, Donald Sterling, had been recorded making racist remarks.

So when NBA Commissioner Silver addressed the world, he was as forceful in his remarks as the league was with the penalties meted against the Los Angeles Clippers' owner.

Among the sanctions, the harshest was a lifetime ban from the sport. Sterling is not allowed to attend games or practices, nor is he permitted to make any decisions about the team or the league.

Of course, in actuality, the harshest penalty would be what may still happen. Silver said he would work to convince the owners of the league's other teams that they should force Sterling to sell the team he has owned for nearly 30 years.

Thoroughbred racing is different from other sports in that they have leagues, team owners and most importantly, a commissioner that wields power.

Racing has 38 state racing commissions, often filled with political appointees who enjoy their own power and control but lack jurisdiction over many aspects of the industry that operates in their state. Worse yet, each state has its own set of rules.

Consensus is difficult. Things move slowly. Those in leadership roles have limited powers.

It is hard to imagine, if not impossible to imagine, Thoroughbred racing ever being like the NBA, Major League Baseball, the NFL or any other professional sports league.

They have owners, players and coaches, all of whom follow a similar set of rules established by the league. Racing has owners, trainers, jockeys, racetrack management and employees, veterinarians, backstretch workers, farriers, agents, horsemen's groups, etc.

(For this discussion, we will leave out the most important group, the bettors.)

What we know is that people who listened to Adam Silver saw the leader of an organization that had a serious problem deal with it and did so swiftly and correctly.

In fact, Silver seemed angry, which was bad for Sterling but good for the fans and the league.

Even those who are not NBA fans--this writer included--were left after Silver's press conference feeling respect and admiration for the professional basketball league.

The comments by Sterling, made to his former, bi-racial mistress, V. Stiviano, are disgusting and reprehensible. They also are nothing new for the 80-year-old billionaire. He was previously accused of refusing to rent apartments to African-Americans and a team executive once accused him of running the Clippers with a "plantation" mentality.

Racing has its own problems and its own image and perception issues.

But racing does not have a commissioner, someone who can deal with issues swiftly and strongly and hand out appropriate punishments.

There are signs of progress in the industry, and a growing sense that more participants realize, understand and accept that there are problems to be addressed.

But absent federal intervention or an office resembling a commissioner, it is hard to grasp how racing will deal with its issues.

Perhaps it should start by watching Adam Silver's press conference.

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